

STATE OF THE COMMUNITY

AUGUST 27, 2008

MAYOR YVONNE J. JOHNSON

Good afternoon. Thank you so much for being here and thanks to the Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event.

(Recognize fellow Council Members.)

As I approach the end of my first year as Mayor of Greensboro, I can say - with certainty - that I have been inspired to grow and learn by this exciting and dynamic City. This is a good time to look back and to assess as we prepare to go forward. A long time ago, the City got its nickname the Gate City because of the large number of railway ties that led from Greensboro to all points. Today we are a gateway in many ways. Through our colleges and universities and research centers, we are the gateway to education. Through our highways, airport, FedEx Hub, and Honda Jet facility, we are the gateway to commerce. Through our resettlement efforts for refugees from oppression, dating all the way back to the Underground Railroad, we are the gateway to safety and opportunity. Through our history of protesting injustice and breaking down barriers, we are the gateway to freedom.

Our beloved Gate City was 200 years old this year. The Bicentennial gave us a time for reflection. We took time to celebrate and reflect, just as I am doing as I near the close of my first year as Mayor. It gave us time to think about “the way we were”, to paraphrase an old movie. The most marvelous thing about the Bicentennial Celebration was the way it brought people together. During the Bicentennial Parade and at the Ball of the Decades, it was heartening to see so many people coming together to celebrate our 200th Birthday. It reminds us that looking back should always serve as a impetus to move forward, for the future will only be as good as we make it; and the choices we make now, will determine the quality of the future.

Despite the downturn in the nation’s economy, growth in downtown Greensboro has continued in the form of new banks, condos and apartments. The targeted loan pool has approved seven applications with the proposed creation of 159 jobs. O’Reilly Auto Parts located in east Greensboro, which demonstrates the value of having “shovel-ready” sites. In addition, six “construction-ready” sites are available. The former Jefferson Pilot campus will be developed into Kisco Senior Living.

All of these developments are signposts that tell us that Greensboro is continuing its growth. FedEx is set to begin operations in the Summer of 2009, and our latest good news is that Mack Trucks, Corp., a subsidiary of Volvo, will locate in Greensboro bringing more than 490 jobs. Our beloved Replacements, Ltd. is expanding its - already successful - facility.

Our population has exceeded 250,000. This means that Greensboro remains the third largest city in the state with the recent annexations.

We have made progress in the past years with the onset of the Joint School of Nano Science and Engineering (a partnership of University of North Carolina at Greensboro and North Carolina A&T State University) which has the potential of creating businesses and new jobs - jobs that we cannot even imagine; and thanks to Lincoln Financial for following through on their commitment to add new jobs to our local economy. We've attracted a number of new businesses to the City, for example: Lenova and ELSAG.

FedEx, Honda Jet and Mack Truck Corp. should stimulate even more interest in our area so that we may continue to strengthen our local tax base. We have made progress in diversifying the economy. Our housing market is less drastically impacted than in some parts of the country; in fact, in our downtown area, rental demand is strong. The unemployment rate is at 6.1%. In November, voters will have the opportunity to authorize 205 million dollars in bonds for street improvements, improvements and renovations to the War Memorial Auditorium, the Parks and Recreation facilities, and housing. We need to pass all of these bonds to continue to be a progressive community.

I am proud that Greensboro is a partner with Guilford County and High Point to end homelessness in the next decade.

We are currently working to provide a day shelter for the homeless in Greensboro. Our quality of life is directly tied to our physical needs and there are some things that are very basic to the well-being of our citizens. Water is one of them; and an attractive and safe environment is another. The recent groundbreaking of the Randleman Water Treatment Plant assures us that we will have water through the 21st Century. We should be able to begin using the Randleman water supply in 2 years.

One of the drawing cards for a city is its attractive, well landscaped areas. Businesses and new members of the community are attracted to an aesthetically pleasing environment. Therefore, it is important to continue to improve the entrances to our Gate City. Gateway Gardens received a \$500,000 grant to improve its entrance to the City and more mixed use and walkable developments are underway.

As we look at our progress, we must also look at our human capital growth. This year we began improvements on bus shelters and bus stops, and implemented a new GTA route to address service on Summit Avenue and Yanceyville Street. Truck traffic near White Street landfill has been reduced by a transfer station. In Glenwood, the community Garden Program provides 30 garden plots and nutritional classes.

In order to be the gateway to opportunity for all of our citizens, we must keep communications going between the City and all its constituents. IMPACT Greensboro was created to build relationships between citizens and the City to improve social capital, and to strengthen neighborhoods.

We all know how important it is to create an environment that will support sustainability as much as possible. Greensboro has made much progress in this regard. This year the mayoral appointed Community Advisory Group on Sustainability has begun its work in earnest. We have made progress on the baseline audit for Cool Cities and the city energy audit which is good for the environment and good for our pocketbooks (and wallets. . .) with a projected \$6 million savings. The Rent-a-Bike-Share-a-Bike Program that is being considered will encourage people to bike more. We have our first hybrid bus, but we need more.

There are new recycling drop offs and we have the highest transit ridership in the City since the inception of GTA. We have increased access to bus service for college students through our HEAT buses. Early Action Compact identified 29 strategies for reducing air pollution. Changes to the signal light system will reduce air pollution. Housing and Community Development have been selected by EPA to receive three brownfields cleanup grants, and Housing and Community Development received a lead hazard control grant in the amount of \$3,000,000.

A safe city must have an effective Fire Department. Our Fire Department continues its high ratings and reaccreditation was achieved this year. We expanded our fire department's ability to respond to terrorist or critical incidents and purchased land for future fire stations. The national search for a chief is on-going.

The area of public safety was of vital concern when we took office. An environment that is safe works to everyone's advantage and is essential if we are to be seen as a great place to work, live, and do business. The Council commissioned the Buracker consultant group to do an assessment of our Police Department. They completed it; we received it and implementation of the recommendations are underway. The Buracker report states that our Police Department is doing a good job overall.

The Hope Project is a gang intervention program under the supervision of the Parks and Recreation Department. Hope Project's receipt of grants, thanks to the tremendous support from the Weaver Foundation and the Greensboro Grasshoppers, has enabled expansion of gang intervention with youth Hotline, and partnership with Leadership Greensboro. They also partner with schools and recreation centers for the purpose of increased mentorship and employment of youth. This program helps get and keep young people out of gangs. The Faith Community, the Greensboro Police Department, some gang members, the Pulpit Forum, and non-profit organizations are collaborating with the City to solve this problem.

Although, we realize that the gang situation cannot be solved by one entity, the City Council voted to fund a gang unit in the Police Department. The Greensboro Police Department is improving community relations, both to aid recruitment and to promote non-violence. We are strengthening our community through practical efforts and better communications. The development of the Youth Police Advisory Council and the police outreach to non-English speaking residents help to make this a reality. The Human

Relations Commission is working on the creation of an International Advisory Committee to increase communications with our diverse community comprised of 87 different ethnic groups. A grant was received to do research on the state of human relations in Greensboro. Another great step has been the partnership between the Guilford County Schools and the Greensboro Human Relations Commission, to create student-led human relation councils to address human relation issues in the schools.

We have been the Gate City for 200 years. How can we continue, and even more importantly how can we become a gateway to an ever increasing global reality? How can we become a gateway to the world?

One of the more encouraging developments of this year will be the conversation between the Guilford County Commissioners and the Greensboro City Council, exploring ways to partner that will be good for all of us. We must continue our aggressive efforts to keep our children on track. Our school system is good, but it needs to be even better and I believe that we have what it takes to make it one of the best. One of the ways Greensboro is helping is with our great library system that provides computers to supplement the educational experience.

While Greensboro is progressing, we definitely have challenges. We must be vigilant about improving social capital. We must make sure we nurture the businesses large and small that presently exist, and continue to support a matrix where new businesses are attracted to Greensboro and can flourish. We need to complete the Civil Rights Museum. We absolutely need to complete the interstate loop around Greensboro. We must do more collaboration in the public and private sectors to create more good jobs so that we can grow our tax base. We need to intensify training of our labor force so that we attract and grow businesses and industry. Thanks to GTCC and Workforce Development for their excellent work in this area. The major goal, is a great quality of life for all of our citizens.

Quality of life issues must continue to improve if we are to entice more businesses to our City. Our efforts, like applying for a grant for green jobs, have to continue, and perhaps accelerate. We must have the courage and creativity to deal with the energy shortage and I believe we do. With the consideration of programs like fleet sharing we can make a difference. The corridor development, specifically the West Lee Street/High Point Road areas, must continue and reach completion and other areas that need facelifts can be made more conducive to the attraction of new businesses. This will benefit downtown and the entire City. We need to continue our support for downtown through revitalization, and finally we must balance all growth with the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

Let us remember to celebrate our assets, our museums, the Cultural Arts Center (our public arts initiative is exciting) , the Carolina Theatre, our great colleges and universities including the Elon Law School, the Moses Cone Health System, our Park System, the New Bridge Bank Park, our Farmer's Markets, the Wyndham Championship, A&T's Homecoming, Center City Park, the Doug Galyon Multi-Modal Transportation Center, the War Memorial, our Coliseum our many small businesses and our large corporations

and industries: VF Corporation, Lorillard, RF Micro, and Timco. Certainly, these are but a few examples.

Great cities serve to nurture and inspire great people. As I look through this year, I realize how much we have done, but Greensboro has only begun to be what it can ultimately become. Though the era of the converging of many railroads in Greensboro may have passed, there are still many ways in which we are an area that excels in connecting, people to people, place to place. It may not be on train tracks, but Greensboro continues to be the gateway for many many people to a quality life, to an exciting life, and to an economically secure and exciting world.